



How can I make buses better?

A guide for young people

About this guide

This guide will give you the information you need to make buses better in your community.

You can use this guide to find out:

- Who runs and makes decisions about buses in your area
- How decisions are made on when and where buses run
- What happens when a bus service is cut
- Who decides how much you pay for your bus fare
- What to expect from your local bus service if you have a disability
- How to make a complaint or suggestion about buses
- How to have your say about public transport

Background to this guide

This guide was written after young people, bus companies, transport authorities and government departments got together to look at ways to improve young people's access to, and experience of, using buses. One of the suggestions was to write this guide.

A companion guide has also been produced providing information for people who work in the bus sector on how they can work with young people to make buses better.

This guide is supported by the 'Taking forward travel and transport for children and young people group'.



Who runs the buses I use?

Bus services are run differently depending on where you live in the country.



In London, Transport for London ([TfL](#)) (reporting to the Mayor) manages bus services. They are responsible for most aspects of bus services from routes, bus stations, bus stops, timetables and checking quality right down to the colour of the buses (red since you ask!). Bus companies then compete to provide the service TfL ask for.

Outside of London, buses are run differently.



- Any company (if they meet legal standards) can start up a bus service, however most are run by ‘the big 5’ bus companies – [Arriva](#), [First](#), [Go-Ahead](#), [National Express](#) and [Stagecoach](#).
- These bus companies can run whatever services they like (see **Box 1: How do bus companies decide which services to run?**) and decide the fares they will charge. As private companies, they need to ensure that, overall, their bus operations are profitable.

Box 1: How do bus companies decide which services to run?

In planning their routes, bus companies may:

- Look at the existing bus network
- Use research on the local population and their travel patterns
- Listen to councils, big employers, local people or bus passenger groups who may ask for a particular service

Bus companies need to ensure that overall, their services are making a profit and so they will be less likely to run services that lose money – even if there’s a need for them in the community.

- If there are gaps in bus services, your transport authority (see **Box 2: Who is my local transport authority?**) may step in to fund extra ‘socially necessary’ bus services.
- Socially necessary bus services are those that wouldn’t be profitable for bus companies to run, but which the community needs (e.g. late night buses that aren’t used by many people or buses to isolated housing estates and rural areas).
- Bus companies are paid by the transport authority to provide these socially necessary bus services.
- Transport authorities have a limited budget to spend on things like socially necessary bus services and must carefully balance the needs of different people (e.g. older people, jobseekers and so on) in deciding where to spend their money.

Box 2: Who is my local transport authority?

Local transport authorities have overall responsibility for public transport in their area. They are responsible for identifying transport needs locally and explaining in their Local Transport Plan how they will meet these needs.

In **London**, the transport authority is Transport for London.

In **Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, the West Midlands and West Yorkshire**, Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs) are the transport authorities. Each PTE reports to an Integrated Transport Authority, made up of elected councillors from the areas they serve.

Everywhere else, your unitary or county council will be your transport authority. Some, typically more rural areas are covered by county councils and district councils. Here it is the county councils that are the transport authorities. In more urban areas, there is usually one council, known as a unitary authority, which is responsible for all local services and will be your transport authority.

To get in touch with your local transport authority, follow links or see the Directory at the end of this guide.

What happens when a bus service is cut?

- **Outside of London**, if a bus company wants to cancel a service, change its timetable or route, it has to give 56 days notice to the Traffic Commissioners (See **Box 3: Who are the Traffic Commissioners?**).
- Bus companies can make these changes as often as they want without having to tell or ask local people (unless they've agreed with the transport authority not to do this).

Box 3: Who are the Traffic Commissioners?

There are seven Traffic Commissioners covering England, Scotland and Wales. On buses and coaches their responsibilities include:

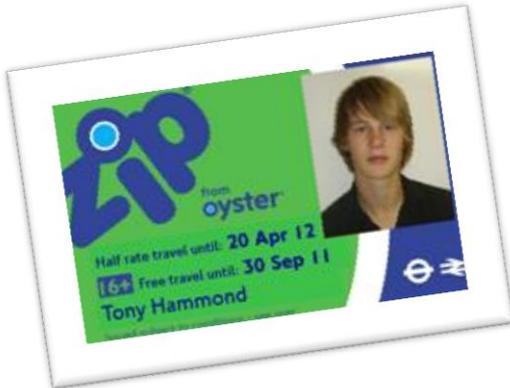
- Giving out the licences that allow buses and coaches to operate legally
- Registering and deregistering local bus services
- Investigating any problems in issuing driving licences to bus drivers and taking action against drivers (e.g. if they are unsafe).
- Fining bus companies that fail to run buses on time

The work of the Traffic Commissioners is supported by the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA).

To get in touch with your Traffic Commissioner, follow links or see the Directory at the end of this guide.

- If a bus service is reduced or cut, and another bus company does not step in to fill the gap, the transport authority must decide whether to pay a bus company to continue running the service. They will consider things like how much it would cost (and their available budget), the number of people who would use it and whether there are other ways people could get around if there was no bus.
- They then present their findings to elected councillors who will decide on whether bus services that have been cut should be paid for by the transport authority
- **Both inside and outside of London**, the transport authority can also cancel or change the bus services it runs as it sees fit. They often review their bus services once a year (or every 5 years in London) after they have looked at their budgets.

Who decides how much I pay for my bus fare?



This depends on where you live in the country.

In London, fares are set by The Mayor.

If you live in London and are under 16, or 16-18 **and** in full-time education, you can get free bus and tram travel with a Zip Oyster photocard, as long as you sign-up and stick to the Behaviour Code. The code ensures you and your fellow passengers travel safely and are treated with respect. Students living in London aged over 18 may be entitled to a discounted fare with an Oyster photocard. Visit www.tfl.gov.uk/tickets/ and click on 'Students and children' to find out more.

Outside of London, fares are decided differently:

- Fares are set by individual bus companies and vary depending on which company you travel with and how far you go.
- Transport authorities run fares schemes to make transport more accessible and affordable for local people. They are required by law to provide free off-peak travel on local buses for older and disabled people. Transport authorities can also offer discounted fares to other groups if they wish, such as young people. They have a limited pot of money to pay for things like this. Other services they may wish to provide, like buses to isolated rural areas or transport help for jobseekers, must come out of the same pot, meaning they must think carefully about where best to spend their money.
- Bus companies may also have their own discounted fare schemes for children and young people – these will vary depending on which bus company you travel with.



How about the cost of transport to school and college?

Your local council must provide free home to school transport if you are:

- Aged 5 to 16 and
- You are attending your nearest suitable school and
- That school is further than walking distance away (more than 2 miles away for children under 8 and more than 3 miles away for 8s and over).

Extra support is also available where there are no safe walking routes, for families on low incomes and for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN), disabilities or mobility problems.

If you are a student aged over 16 you may also be able to get help with transport to education and training. By the end of May each year, all local authorities must publish a transport policy statement, setting out how they will help students of sixth form age get to education and training. This might include providing transport to and from college or help with transport costs.

To find out what transport support is available in your area, use the postcode search on www.direct.gov.uk under Education and Learning → 14 to 19 → Money to learn → Extra help with your learning costs → Help with the cost of transport → [‘Find out about transport for 16-19 year olds in your area’](#).





I have a disability – what can I expect from my local bus service?

Transport providers have a duty to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ if their services are not fully accessible to disabled people. What’s considered ‘reasonable’ will vary, and things like cost will be taken into account in deciding whether or not to make a change.

Bus stations and stops: Providers of bus stations and stops must not discriminate against disabled people and have a duty to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to make their services accessible to all.

Vehicles: All new buses designed to carry more than 22 passengers must be accessible to disabled people. By 1st January 2017 all buses must be accessible. Most vehicles now meet accessibility standards, but until 2017 there is still a risk that the bus you want to get will not be accessible.

Drivers: Bus drivers and other staff can make all the difference in making sure disabled people can use buses. Even an accessible bus can become inaccessible if a bus driver does not know how to assist disabled passengers properly. Bus drivers are required by law to provide ‘reasonable assistance’ to disabled people, especially in getting on and off the bus. Throughout the country, more and more staff are being trained to be able to assist disabled passengers. Recent European law includes a requirement for bus companies to provide disability awareness training to drivers.

Fares: Young people with a disability can get a national bus pass which gives free travel on local buses. Who and what the scheme covers varies slightly between England, Wales and Scotland. Go to www.direct.gov.uk and search for ‘free bus travel’ to find out more.

Information: Bus companies and transport authorities usually provide travel information in a range of different formats, such as large print or audio, to suit the different needs of their passengers. From 2013, disabled people will have a right to travel information both before and during the journey and, where possible, this should be in an accessible format.

How can I give feedback about local buses?

The illustration below should help you work out who is responsible for what. **If you want to report crime or anti-social behaviour on the bus, refer to Box 4 on the next page.** For contact details and more information about the different organisations, see the Directory at the end of this guide.



Box 4: Reporting crime or personal safety concerns

If you want to report crime or have concerns about your personal safety on a bus, speak to the nearest member of staff or call the police.

Only use 999 if it is an emergency.

In non-emergencies, call your local policing team who will have their own local phone number. You can find their contact details by typing your postcode into www.police.uk. Some areas will also have dedicated safer travel teams.

You can also call Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 to give information anonymously about any crime.



How can I have my say about public transport?

Opportunities to play a part in transport decision-making vary from place-to-place – you'll need to do some research locally to find out what options there are. Here are some examples of opportunities you might come across.

Public consultations

- Look out for public consultations run by your transport authority or local bus companies.
- Public consultations are carried out to listen to people's views about transport. This information is then used to help with decision-making.
- They might be advertised on transport authority or bus company websites, in the local press or on leaflets and posters sent round and displayed locally.
- Consultations usually take place when there are changes planned for local bus services, when a new plan or strategy has been drawn up or when a major new transport project has been designed.
- During the consultation, you'll be able to learn more about the planned changes through leaflets and public exhibitions and there will be an opportunity for you to have your say by talking to staff or writing a comment.



Youth panels



Some transport authorities have panels of young people who are asked for their opinions on transport matters, or even help hold transport decision-makers to account through what is known as the scrutiny process.

Get in touch with your local transport authority to find out how they consult with young people and how you can get involved (see the Directory for contact details).

Campaigning locally

You can also try to influence decision-making by campaigning locally about bus services (see **Box 5: Useful campaigning resources**).

One way to do this is to join up with other young people in your area who also care about improving public transport. Youth councils are groups of young people who join together to have a say and be heard on decisions being made that affect them. You can find your local youth council here:

<http://www.byc.org.uk/get-active/find-your-local-youth-council.aspx>

Box 5: Useful campaigning resources

Planning a Campaign – UK Youth Parliament guide

[http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/myp_handbook/Planning a Campaign.pdf](http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/myp_handbook/Planning_a_Campaign.pdf)

This general guide to planning an effective campaign sets out the golden rules for any campaigner.

Campaigning resources – British Youth Council

<http://www.byc.org.uk/resource-centre/campaigning.aspx>

This online resource centre contains a wide range of useful documents to help in campaigning from briefings on key issues (including transport) to lobbying guides.

Trailblazers' Campaigns Guide

[http://www.mdctrailblazers.org/assets/0000/0268/Trailblazers Campaigns Guide.pdf](http://www.mdctrailblazers.org/assets/0000/0268/Trailblazers_Campaigns_Guide.pdf)

Trailblazers is a nationwide organisation of young disabled and non-disabled campaigners. They campaign on a number of issues, including improving public transport for disabled people. This guide sets out key techniques and strategies for an effective campaign.

Get the bus you need – Campaign for Better Transport Campaigning Guide

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/local_campaigning/online_guides/better_buses

This online campaigning guide is designed to help you understand what to do if your bus has been cut, if you need a bus service that isn't there or if you want to improve your current bus service (e.g. make it more frequent, run to a different timetable or change the route).

Improve the bus network – Campaign for Better Transport Campaigning Guide

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/local_campaigning/online_guides/bus-networks

This Campaign for Better Transport online campaigning guide helps you understand how to improve bus services in your area as a whole.

Where can I find more information?



Transport Authorities (see Box 3 earlier in this guide for more about transport authorities)

Area	Transport Authority	Website
Greater Manchester (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan)	Transport for Greater Manchester	http://www.tfgm.com/
London	Transport for London	http://www.tfl.gov.uk/
Merseyside (Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, Wirral)	Merseytravel	http://www.merseytravel.gov.uk/
South Yorkshire (Barnsley, Doncaster,	SYPT	http://www.sypte.co.uk/

Rotherham, Sheffield)

Tyne and Wear Nexus <http://www.nexus.org.uk/>
(Gateshead,
Newcastle, North
Tyneside, South
Tyneside, Sunderland)

West Midlands Centro <http://www.centro.org.uk>
(Birmingham,
Coventry, Dudley,
Sandwell, Solihull,
Walsall,
Wolverhampton)

West Yorkshire Metro <http://www.wymetro.com/>
(Bradford, Calderdale,
Kirklees, Leeds,
Wakefield)

Everywhere else in Your local Find out who your local council is
England council on Directgov. If the search brings
up two results, a District Council
and a County Council, the County
Council will be the transport
authority for your area.
<http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/Start.do?mode=1>

Main bus companies

Arriva <http://www.arrivabus.co.uk/talk-to-us/>

First Group http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/contact_us/

Go-Ahead <http://www.go-ahead.com/goahead/ourcompanies/bus/>

National Express <http://www.nationalexpress.com/help.aspx>

Stagecoach <http://www.stagecoachbus.com/customersercontact.aspx>

Passenger and industry watchdogs

Bus Appeals Body <http://www.busappealsbody.co.uk/>

The Bus Appeals Body will look into complaints on things like buses running to time, charging the correct fare and the behaviour of staff. It will investigate on your behalf if you have complained to the bus company first but were not happy with their response (or you didn't get a response at all). It can't deal with complaints about how much the company charges for fares or about where and when buses run.

London TravelWatch <http://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/>

London TravelWatch will look into complaints and problems on any aspect of London transport. It will investigate on your behalf if you have complained to the transport provider first but were not happy with their response (or you didn't get a response at all).

Passenger Focus <http://www.passengerfocus.org.uk/>

Passenger Focus does not investigate individual complaints from passengers. It focuses on campaigning and research to get the best deal for all bus, coach and tram passengers outside London (as well as for all rail passengers). They work with bus companies, passenger groups and government to influence decision making and make the passenger voice heard.

Traffic Commissioners – there are seven Traffic Commissioners covering England, Scotland and Wales. For more about their role, see Box 3 earlier in this guide. To find the Traffic Commissioner for your area, visit

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/topics/tpm/traffic-commissioners/>

Local Councillors and MPs

To find contact details for your local Councillors (who represent you on your local council) or your local MP (who represents you in the House of Commons) visit www.writetothem.com

Central government

Department for Transport <http://www.dft.gov.uk>